

SUNDAY, JANUARY 9, 2022

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST; SUNDAY AFTER NATIVITY: THE HOLY RIGHTEOUS ONES: JOSEPH THE BETROTHED, DAVID THE KING, AND JAMES, THE BROTHER OF THE LORD; THE HOLY APOSTLE, PROTOMARTYR AND ARCHDEACON STEPHEN

RESURRECTIONAL TROPARION - TONE FOUR:
When the women disciples of the Lord learned from the angel the joyous message of Thy Resurrection; they cast away the ancestral curse and elatedly told the apostles: Death is overthrown! Christ God is Risen, granting the world great mercy.

NATIVITY TROPARION - TONE FOUR:
Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, has shone to the world the Light of Wisdom. For by it, those who worshiped the stars were taught by a star to adore Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know Thee the Orient from on high. O Lord, glory to Thee!

TROPARION TO THE HOLY RIGHTEOUS ONES - TONE TWO:
Proclaim the wonder, O Joseph, to David, the ancestor of God: you saw a Virgin great with Child; you gave glory with the shepherds; you worshipped with the Magi; you received the news from the angel. Pray to Christ God to save our souls.

TROPARION TO THE APOSTLE, PROTOMARTYR, & ARCHDEACON STEPHEN – TONE FOUR:
You admirably endured your martyrdom, O Christ's first martyr, holy Stephen, and put to shame the malice of your tormentors; for as you were being killed by stones hurled at you by lowly people, you received the crown from the divine right hand from above; and you cried out to God, saying: O Lord, forgive them this sin!

KONTAKION TO THE HOLY RIGHTEOUS ONES – TONE THREE:
Today godly David is filled with joy; Joseph and James offer praise. The glorious crown of their kinship with Christ fills them with great joy. They sing praises to the One ineffably born on earth, and they cry out: 'O Compassionate One, save those who honor You!'

NATIVITY KONTAKION - TONE THREE:
Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One! Angels, with shepherds, glorify Him! The wise men journey with the star! Since for our sake the eternal God was born as a little child.

INSTEAD OF "IT IS TRULY MEET…":
Magnify, O my soul, the most pure Virgin Theotokos, more honorable and more glorious than the heavenly hosts. I behold a strange, most glorious mystery! Heaven – the cave! The cherubic throne – the Virgin! The manger – the place where Christ lay, the uncontainable God whom we magnify in song!

EPISTLE READING

THE PROKEIMENON IN TONE FOUR:
O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all.

GALATIANS 1: 11-19
Brethren, I make known to you that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

THE ALLELUIA VERSES:
Remember, O Lord, in David's favor all the hardships he endured. How he swore to the Lord and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob.

GOSPEL READING

MATTHEW 2: 13-23
At that time, when the wise men had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son." Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." Now when Herod was dead, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

FROM THE PROLOGUE:

DECEMBER 27/JANUARY 9, BY SAINT NIKOLAI VELIMIROVIC:
The Holy Protomartyr Stephen the Archdeacon
Stephen was a kinsman of the Apostle Paul and one of those Jews who lived in the Hellenic provinces. Stephen was the first of the seven deacons whom the holy apostles ordained and appointed to the service of assisting the poor in Jerusalem. For this, he is called the archdeacon. By the power of his faith, Stephen

worked great miracles among the people. The wicked Jews disputed with him, but they were always defeated by his wisdom and the power of the Spirit, Who acted through him. Then the shameful Jews, accustomed to calumnies and slander, incited the people and the elders of the people against the innocent Stephen, slandering him as though he had blasphemed against God and against Moses. False witnesses were quickly found who confirmed this. Stephen then stood before the people, and all saw his face as it had been the face of an angel (Acts 6:15), that is, his face was illumined with the light of grace as was once the face of Moses when he spoke with God. Stephen opened his mouth and enumerated the many good works and miracles that God had performed in the past for the people of Israel, as well as the many crimes and opposition to God on the part of this people. He especially rebuked them for the killing of Christ the Lord, calling them betrayers and murderers (Acts 7:52). And while they gnashed their teeth, Stephen beheld and saw the heavens open and the glory of God. That which he saw, he declared to the Jews: Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God! (Acts 7:56). Then the malicious men took him outside the city and stoned him to death. Among his persecutors was his kinsman Saul, later the Apostle Paul. At that time, the Most-holy Theotokos, standing on a rock at a distance with St. John the Theologian, witnessed the martyrdom of this first martyr for the truth of her Son and God, and she prayed to God for Stephen. This occurred one year after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. Gamaliel, a prince of the Jews and a secret Christian, clandestinely took St. Stephen's body and buried it on his own estate. Thus, this first among the Christian martyrs gloriously reposed and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of Christ God.

The Venerable Martyrs Theodore and Theophanes

The Branded Theodore and Theophanes were blood brothers, born in Palestine and well educated in both secular and spiritual wisdom. They were monks in the community of St. Sava the Sanctified and later were ordained presbyters. They suffered harshly for their defense of icons under three emperors: Leo the Armenian, Michael Balbus and Theophilus. The demented Theophilus beat them with his own hands and ordered that they be branded with iron on their faces with derisive verses, for which they were called "the Branded." They were cast into prison in the town of Apamea in Bithynia. Theodore died there from his pains and wounds. Theophanes, freed at the time of the Emperors Theodore and Michael, was consecrated Metropolitan of Nicaea by Patriarch Methodius. St. Theodore died in the year 833. These two wonderful brothers suffered for Christ and received a wonderful reward from Him in the Immortal Kingdom of Light.

St. Maximus, bishop of Alexandria (282).
St. Theodore, patriarch of Constantinople (686).
St. Luke, monk, of Tryglia.
Uncovering of the relics (1514) of St. Therapont, abbot, of Belozersk and Mozhaisk (1426).
St. Boniface, founder of the St. Panteleimon Monastery (Kiev) (1871).
St. Barlaam, metropolitan of Tobolsk and all Siberia (1802).
New Hieromartyrs Tikhon, archbishop of Voronezh, and with him 160 martyred priests (1919).
(Greek cal.: Martyrs Maurice and his son Photinus, with 70 soldiers, of Apamea [286-305]).

HYMN OF PRAISE: The Holy Protomartyr Stephen the Archdeacon

Upon Stephen, illumined by the Spirit,
The Jewish murderers rushed.
Bloody Stephen knelt
And in a loud voice cried out to God:
"O Lord, Who from the Cross forgave
The greatest sin to ever shake the earth,

The greatest sin that heaven ever beheld,
Thou forgavest Thy murderers.
Now, O Most-gracious One, forgive mine also!
This crime—what is it compared to that one?
And I, what am I, compared to my Lord?"
Saying this he gave his spirit to God.
The angry elders, ugly cowards,
Dispersed after they killed him.
Then from heaven angels flew down
Around the body of the Protomartyr.
They chanted a hymn in chorus to him
And carried his paradisal soul to Paradise.

REFLECTION

A story of the Divine Christ-child: Both great prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, prophesied that the Lord would come to Egypt and that His presence would shake the pagan temples and destroy the idols. Isaiah wrote: Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence (Isaiah 19:1, cf. Jeremiah 43:12–13). When the divine refugees came to the city of Hermopolis (Cairo), they approached a pagan temple, and all the idols in that temple suddenly fell down and were shattered. St. Palladius writes of this in his Lausiac History: "We saw the pagan temple there, in which all the carved idols fell to the ground at the coming of the Savior." In a certain place called Sirin there were 365 idols. When the Most-holy Virgin entered that temple with the Divine Child in her arms, all these idols fell down and were shattered. All the idols throughout Egypt fell in the same manner. The Holy Prophet Jeremiah, living in Egypt in old age, had prophesied to the pagan priests of Egypt that all the idols would fall and all the graven images would be destroyed at the time when a Virgin Mother with a Child, born in a manger, would come to Egypt. The pagan priests remembered well this prophecy. In accordance with it, they carved out a representation of a Virgin as she lay on a bed and, next to her in a manger, her young Child wrapped in swaddling clothes; and they venerated this representation. King Ptolemy asked the pagan priests what this representation meant, and they replied that it was a mystery, foretold by a prophet to their fathers, and that they were awaiting the fulfillment of this mystery. And, indeed, this mystery was fulfilled, and revealed not only in Egypt but also in the entire world.

HOMILY

on the Most-holy Virgin, the Theotokos

"My soul doth magnify the Lord" (Luke 1:46)

Brethren, we have in total only a few words spoken by the Most-holy Theotokos recorded in the Gospels. All of her words pertain to the magnification of God. She was silent before men but her soul conversed unceasingly with God. Every day and every hour, she found a new reason and incentive to magnify God. If only we were able to know and to record all her magnifications of God throughout her whole life, oh, how many books would it take! But, even by this one magnification, which she spoke before her kinswoman Elizabeth, the mother of the great Prophet and Forerunner John, every Christian can evaluate what a fragrant and God-pleasing flower was her most holy soul. This is but one wonderful canticle of the soul of the Theotokos, which has come down to us through the Gospel. However, such canticles were without number in the course of the life of the Most-blessed One. Even before she heard the Gospel from the lips of her Son, she knew how to speak with God and to glorify Him in accordance with the teaching of the Gospel. This knowledge came to her from the Holy Spirit of God, whose grace constantly poured into her like clear water into a pure vessel. Her soul magnified God with canticles throughout her whole life, and therefore God magnified her above the Cherubim and the Seraphim. Likewise, small and sinful

as we are, the same Lord will magnify in His Kingdom us who magnify her, if we exert ourselves to fill this brief life with the magnification of God in our deeds, words, thoughts and prayers.
O Most-holy, Most-pure and Most-blessed Theotokos, cover us with the wings of thy prayers. To thee and thy Son and our Lord be glory and praise forever. Amen.